

March 29, 2017

LARGE EMPLOYERS IN OKALOOSA COUNTY ARE TOBACCO FREE



Contact: Ryan Mims

HealthyOkaloosaPIO@flhealth.gov

(850) 833-9240 ext. 2162

Cell: (850) 420-2198

Okaloosa County, Fla — Okaloosa County School District, Fort Walton Beach Medical Center, Twin Cities Hospital, and North Okaloosa Medical Center have created tobacco free policies to protect their employees and the public against the dangers of tobacco and secondhand smoke. They are joining the growing number of Florida school districts and employers in creating a healthier environment by eliminating all forms of tobacco, on all grounds at all times by everyone.

“We encourage all employers to follow the Okaloosa County School District and the hospitals’ lead in becoming tobacco free,” stated Dr. Karen A. Chapman, Director of the Florida Department of Health in Okaloosa County. “There are major economic benefits to reducing the amount of tobacco use within a workplace, and employees should take advantage of having a tobacco free policy.”

Tobacco use comes with many steep costs. It costs many smokers their health, their money and their time with friends and family. The consequences do not stop there. Employers are paying the price as well. Smoking majorly increases productivity loss, premature death, and direct medical expenditures. There is no greater way to repay employees’ hard work and dedication than to support them on the long, difficult, but valuable journey to quit smoking.

Employers are increasingly recognizing that helping their employees quit smoking can provide a noticeable boost to their bottom line. Many workplaces are introducing smoking cessation programs that can benefit everyone involved. There are four key elements that comprise the gold standard for promoting a tobacco free workplace.

- **Implement a smoke-free workplace policy.** Florida state law prohibits smoking inside enclosed workplaces, but employers can extend smoking bans to the surrounding areas of an office building to protect employees from the deadly effects of secondhand smoke and encourage smokers to quit.
- **Support smoking cessation through health benefits.** Whether it is through providing coverage for counseling and pharmaceutical aids, or providing materials and information about how to quit smoking, there are many ways to motivate smokers to make a quit attempt. The money spent to support these efforts will be far less than the productivity loss and health care costs associated with employees who smoke.
- **Cessation initiatives.** Many employers are offering financial incentives and rewards to those who quit smoking successfully and remain smoke-free. These incentives programs can be coupled with other office-wide wellness initiatives that support healthy habits such as maintaining a balanced diet and exercising regularly.
- **Work with health care providers.** Teaming up with physicians and other health care providers can amplify the impact of cessation initiatives. Offering incentives to doctors who refer smokers to cessation services, or helping physicians spread information about

quit lines and other ways to seek support, can be an effective method of improving workplace health.

Tobacco Free Florida offers a number of free resources to help smokers quit. For more information and tips to help quit smoking, visit www.tobaccofreeflorida.com. If other employers in Okaloosa County are interested in learning more about going tobacco free, contact DOH-Okaloosa at 850-833-9240, extension 2351 or tobaccofreeokaloosa@flhealth.gov.

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

Follow us on Twitter at [@HealthyFla](#) and on [Facebook](#). For more information about the Florida Department of Health, please visit www.FloridaHealth.gov.

About Tobacco Free Florida

The department's Tobacco Free Florida campaign is a statewide cessation and prevention campaign funded by Florida's tobacco settlement fund. Since the program began in 2007, more than 159,000 Floridians have successfully quit using one of Tobacco Free Florida's free tools and services. There are now approximately 451,000 fewer adult smokers in Florida than there was 10 years ago, and the state has saved \$17.7 billion in health care costs. To learn more about Tobacco Free Florida's Quit Your Way services, visit www.tobaccofreeflorida.com or follow the campaign on Facebook at www.facebook.com/TobaccoFreeFlorida or on Twitter at www.twitter.com/tobaccofreefla.

###